

THE GALTRÖP CORE

AN
INTRODUCTORY
GAME DESIGN SRD



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INTRODUCTION

Hey there, I'm Lex, AKA titanomachyRPG.

Full disclosure: I'm brand new to game design. I come from D&D 5e and have since branched out to other games, as well as writing my own! (Check out titanomachyrpg.itch.io to see them.)

Which is all to say: Everything here should be taken with a grain of salt. A lot of this is stuff I've taught myself or read in other RPGs. I am NOT pretending to be an expert here. I do think I have a particular penchant for getting over the "just get started" hump, however, so I want to offer you some tools to begin!

The Caltrop Core is hopefully a system with simple mechanical tools that anyone can build on to make their first game!

If you're new to game design, welcome! We're on this journey together. The core mechanic fits on a single page, but I'll be adding some tips and tricks throughout to help you along making your first game.

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THE GALTROP CORE

Here's the core of the system, using d4s. It all fits on one page, so keep this handy while designing for it!

For a stat-driven game, simply assign a number between 1 and 4 to each stat. When that stat comes into play, roll that many d4s. Take the highest roll.

For a token-based game, players can gain and expend tokens, rolling as many d4s as tokens they expend. Take the highest roll.

TIP: Only roll dice when the action can be phrased as an “I want to...” statement.

D4 RESULT

- 1 ABSOLUTE FAILURE. You don't get what you want and things get a lot worse.
- 2 PARTIAL FAILURE. You don't get what you want.
- 3 PARTIAL SUCCESS. You get what you want, but things get complicated.
- 4 ABSOLUTE SUCCESS. You get what you want — and more.

CLARIFICATION

Now, “stat-driven” and “token-based” games aren’t mutually exclusive categories (Kids on Brooms is both). They’re not really categories at all; it’s just how I think of different types of games.

To me, “stat-driven” refers to games like D&D, where your stats directly influence outcomes. There will be an example of a stat-driven game built on the Caltrop Core starting on the next page.

“Token-based” games allow players to accumulate tokens in roleplay and spend them to influence the story in some way. Generally works well for narrative/roleplay-focused games, not as easily for combat simulation. My game NIGHTHAWKS is an example of a token-based game I built on the Caltrop Core.

DEMO BUILD

The Caltrop Core is extremely bare bones so you can make whatever you want on top of it. Any cool complexity and depth you add is all you, baby! Or you can just use it for 1–page games and design practice. It's a lot of freedom, which can be daunting, but let's do a quick demo build together.

First, pick a genre. I'm thinking fantasy. A common reference point. Fantasy games are often stat-driven, so let's try that "mode" of the Caltrop Core. For simplicity, come up with just 3 stats. Here are mine.

STATS

- **BODY.** Roll to resolve risky physical activity.
- **MIND.** Roll to resolve rigorous mental activity.
- **SOUL.** Roll to resolve precarious emotional activity.

You start out with 1 in each stat and cannot go above 4. This number represents how many d4s you roll for each stat.

CHOOSE AN UPBRINGING

This overlaps with the idea of traditional fantasy "races," but applies to any increased attribute as a result of where you're from. Add 1 to a stat of your choice, relating to your Upbringing.

DEMO

BUILD

HEALTH

You don't need to track health unless you want to. In fantasy RPGs, hit points are a common way to create stakes. Since we'll have a lot of d4s handy, we can build a system around that die.

Everyone has 4 health to start. Use a d4 to track it, adjusting it when you take damage. Decide what happens when you take damage at 1 health, as well as how characters die (if at all).

COMBAT

In general, you will roll BODY when engaging in combat. Here's how that shakes out. Each individual die resolves individually. If you roll 3 1s, you take 3 damage. If you roll 3 4s, you deal 6 damage.

D4 RESULT

- 1 You take 1 damage as your opponent counters your attack.
- 2 You do not hit, and you are in the same position as before.
- 3 You hit and deal 1 damage.
- 4 You hit and deal 2 damage.

DEMO BUILD

Classes are always fun, so I'm going to make some here. But classes aren't the only way of doing things. You can also develop a "pick list" of abilities that a character can use to build out their own custom kit.

WARRIOR

Your BODY increases by 1.

TOUGH. Any damage you take is reduced by 1.

ROGUE

Your BODY or MIND increases by 1.

STREET SMART. Roll BODY+MIND to sneak around, pick locks, get information, and steal small items.

CLERIC

Your SOUL increases by 1.

CURE. Roll BODY+SOUL. You can restore an amount of health equal to the number of 4s you rolled to an ally you can see.

WIZARD

Your MIND increases by 1.

ELEMENTAL BOLT. Roll MIND+SOUL to unleash a streak of elemental energy of your choice. You can deal an amount of damage equal to the number of 4s you rolled to one target you can see within 25 yards of you.

DEMO BUILD

You can add a leveling up system if you'd like. Some options I've seen are...

- **STORY-BASED ADVANCEMENT.** After a significant narrative milestone, the GM can elect to award a level up.
- **SCALING EXPERIENCE POINTS.** Commonly seen in video game RPGs, each level has a fixed, predetermined number of XP required to reach it, and every monster has a fixed, predetermined number of XP it awards upon defeat.
- **FAIL FORWARD.** These systems reward you when you fail a roll. Maybe you get 1 XP every time you fail, and every 5 XP, you level up.

Then you can decide what a character receives upon level up, like +1 HP, +1 to a stat, or a new ability.

DEMO BUILD

That's enough to start playing! And you can always create more abilities and mechanics along the way. Is this game good? Probably not. But it's enough of a finished game to play — and that's how you get started! The only way to do it is to do it.

I know there's a fear of making a bad thing. But what if your game was bad? What happens then? Probably not much, yeah?

And I know neurodivergence can make things harder. But try to give yourself some grace. No berating today. Just let yourself be. You're doing as much as you can do right now. Even if you could do more, would it be healthy?

PLUG 'N' PLAY

Here's a little cheat sheet to get started. But remember, none of this is law.

Genre:

Tone:

Goal of the players, if any:

STAT- DRIVEN

- Pick a number of stats and name each one.
- Will the game use a class system, a pick list, or a combination of both?
- What is the core gameplay loop?
- What does this loop say about your values?

TOKEN- BASED

- What area of gameplay do tokens help resolve?
- How do characters acquire tokens?
- What can a character expend tokens to do?
- What does this type of exchange say about your values?

MAKING A CALTROP CORE GAME

If you want to use this system, simply put “Built on Caltrop Core” somewhere in your doc! And a link to my Twitter (<https://twitter.com/titanomachyRPG>) and/or my Itch (<https://titanomachyRPG.itch.io>) would be greatly appreciated.

You are expressly forbidden from using this system to make games promoting racist, ableist, homophobic, transphobic, misogynist, fascist, or any otherwise bigoted ideas.

And if you're able, I encourage you to use a portion of the proceeds from any Caltrop Core game you release to support PoC game designers, game designers in the global south (like #RPGLATAM and #RPGSEA), local bail funds, mutual aid when you see someone in need online, something GOOD.



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